

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002559

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2012

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: COURT FINDS FORMER MP GUILTY OF SLANDERING
GOVERNMENT, SENTENCES HER TO 1 1/2 YEARS IN PRISON.

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm Reason: 1.5 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The State Security Court May 16 sentenced former Member of Parliament Toujan Faisal to one and a half years in prison. Because she was convicted of only "misdemeanors," she has no right to appeal. Faisal was convicted on all of four charges levied against her: 1) slandering the judiciary, 2) publishing false and exaggerated news abroad deemed harmful to the country's integrity, 3) publishing false material deemed harmful to the country and its citizens and 4) insulting the faith of another. Faisal's prosecution appears to be the result of a political vendetta by PM Abul Ragheb, against whom she made public allegations of corruption. Even though an isolated incident, Faisal's conviction serves as an unfortunate reminder that the GOJ still has the ability to use the judicial system against its domestic critics -- at least against those who, like Faisal, are unpopular and politically isolated.
END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND) AN UNPOPULAR OPPONENT

12. (C) Toujan Faisal was elected to Parliament in 1993 -- the only woman ever to be elected by popular vote. She was not reelected in 1997. She was active in Jordanian media and government before her tenure as an MP. After her 1997 electoral loss and prior to her March 16 arrest, Faisal was seen almost universally as a political opportunist who had little public support and who was essentially finished as a politician. Even the most ardent of Faisal's supporters have abandoned her of late. In a 19 May meeting with POLOFF, Faisal's former campaign manager lamented the former MP's political demise, stating that Faisal had blown her opportunity to be the liberal)- as opposed to Islamic)- opposition leader in Jordan.

13. (C) Among other public attacks on the GOJ, Faisal accused Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb of corruption; her specific charge was that he and his family were profiting from a law that raised auto insurance premiums. On a recent venture to Iraq, Faisal publicly blasted the GOJ from Baghdad, alleging in front of an Iraqi audience that King Abdullah II and the PM were corrupt. In addition, she sent a letter to the King accusing several other officials of corruption. Following her arrest, Faisal was first released following the intervention of prominent members of the Circassian community with the PM. However, following further statements by Faisal critical of PM Abul Ragheb, her Circassian supporters apparently absolved themselves of any responsibility for her actions, and Faisal was rearrested three days later and incarcerated pending trial.

VENDETTA POLITICS

14. (C) It appears that the notoriously thin-skinned PM, despite efforts by senior GOJ officials to mollify his anger, personally made the decision to punish Faisal for her public allegations against him, the King and others. PAO reports that, in a recent dinner with senior GOJ officials, Minister of Tourism Taleb Rifai openly challenged the tactics employed by the PM against Faisal; Minister of Higher Education Walid Maani defended the PM's actions and Minister of Telecommunication Fawaz Zobi sought to moderate and tone down the heated discussion (which occurred in the presence of senior Embassy officials). The Ambassador also raised the Faisal case during the course of her trial with PM Abul Ragheb, who was unrepentant, accusing Faisal of spreading lies about him and other cabinet ministers.

15. (C) Former MP and Islamic Action Front (IAF) member Abdullah Akayleh told POLOFF in a May 15 meeting that the whole event is an example of Jordanian politics at its worst, with the PM actually raising the profile of and lending credence to the allegation of a nearly forgotten

former MP. In a 16 May meeting with POLOFF, a senior GOJ official heatedly criticized the tactics of the PM, stating that it was bad for Jordan and bad for the King. This view is widespread in political circles, although the PM continues to hold support for his actions against Faisal, in particular from former PM Zaid bin Shahr.

THE VERDICT MAKES FAISAL INELIGIBLE TO SERVE IN PARLIAMENT

16. (C) The State Security Court May 16 found Faisal guilty of all four misdemeanor charges levied against her and sentenced her to 18 months in custody. Most people familiar with the case expected Faisal to be given a six-month sentence, although the Court had the authority to sentence her for up to three years. Since these crimes are technically "misdemeanors," the amendments made to the State Security Court law last September prohibit an appeal. In addition, the eighteen-month sentence will likely prevent her from running for the Parliament in the future: the Constitution bars candidacy for all those who have received a sentence in excess of one year. In a 19 May meeting with POLOFF, a local reporter indicated that there is discussion about the possibility of the King commuting Faisal's sentence.

COMMENT

17. (C) Faisal is unpopular in the political establishment and is seen by most as an obstreperous political opportunist. Over the years her traditional supporters, i.e. educated, anti-Islamist women, have essentially abandoned her because of her abrasive manner and ineffectiveness on key issues. Nevertheless, PM Abul Ragheb's politically motivated prosecution has made her appear to be a victim of GOJ persecution, given her allegations of corruption greater local political weight, and -- at least temporarily -- raised her political profile. The harsh prison sentence -- likely given to prevent Faisal from running for Parliament in the future -- may make some Jordanians think twice about firing salvos toward the government. However, it has also emboldened some regime critics) ironically including her political adversary the Islamic Action Front -- who have adopted Faisal's case as a club to use to beat up the government. While Faisal's case appears to be an isolated incident, her prosecution, conviction, and harsh sentence show that senior GOJ officials can still use the judicial system to attack domestic critics.

Gnehm